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ABSTRACT

Discussed are critical variables in the mainstreaming of hearing impaired children. Identified are eight types of mainstreaming (without supportive help); guidelines for establishing a program (such as preparing the staff); and essential elements in maintaining a program (such as monitoring student progress). (LS)

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CRITICAL VARIABLES IN THE MAINSTREAMING OF HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN

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The term mainstream refers to an abstract concept of a prevailing current of direction, activity or influence. When we discuss the educational mainstreaming of exceptional children, we are using a general term which is as ambiguous as the term deaf. I prefer to specify the types of mainstreaming which now serve hearing impaired children, in order to define the particular educational milieu which one might wish to discuss.

Type I: Complete mainstreaming of the student in his or her neighborhood school without supportive help from a specialist.

Type II: Full mainstreaming of the student in his or her neighborhood school with supportive instruction from a teacher of the hearing impaired or other kind of specialist.

Type III: Partial mainstreaming of the student who is based in a special resource room and attends some general education classes.

Type IV: Team teaching arrangements in which general education teachers and teachers of the hearing impaired cooperatively teach both normally hearing and hearing impaired students in a general education setting.

Type V: Reverse mainstreaming in which normally hearing students become part of a class of hearing impaired students. This type is most common at the preschool level.

Type VI: Self-contained classes from which hearing impaired students go to general education classes for instruction in one or more academic subjects.

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Type VII: Self-contained classes from which hearing impaired students go to general education classes to participate in one or more non-academic activities.

Type VIII: Completely self-contained classes in which hearing impaired students have occasional contact with normally hearing peers.

The primary aim of all types of mainstreaming should be to promote natural contact and meaningful communication among hearing impaired and normally hearing students in AGE APPROPRIATE PEER GROUPS. A secondary aim is to heighten the expectation levels of achievement for and by hearing impaired students.

Mainstreaming implies a strong support program staffed by teachers of the hearing impaired, as well as the existence of a sound general education program. The mainstreaming of hearing impaired children is not a unitary educational approach, but subsumes a variety of alternative plans in which individual students can succeed on their various paths toward self-actualization and educational achievement.

Complete mainstreaming is not appropriate or desirable for every hearing impaired child. Experiences which frustrate a child because of inability to participate meaningfully should not be forced upon him or her in the false hope that incidental benefits will accrue.

Mainstreaming has already become an emotionally charged word within educational circles and subject to much misinterpretation. A recent article in a state education association journal gave the misleading idea to its teacher-readers that the new federal legislation (P.L. 94-412) required that handicapped children must be educated in the general education classroom. Other equally erroneous interpretations are that mainstreaming will offer an easy way to reduce educational expenditures; that complete mainstreaming

(Type I) is the desired goal for all hearing impaired children; that mainstreaming is not feasible for the profoundly hearing impaired child; that children in programs which use sign language cannot be mainstreamed.

In spite of certain misconceptions, the rapidly growing number of people who support mainstream education indicates that significant, positive changes in attitudes towards handicapped people are occuring.

Establishing a Program

In the past few months I have received many requests for lists of criteria which can be used to determine if a hearing impaired child is ready to be mainstreamed. While these criteria may be useful, it is more important to assess the educational milieu to determine if it is ready for the hearing impaired child.

In starting a mainstream program from scratch, there are some critical variables to be considered. The most critical is to develop a long range plan of enlisting the support of those people who will contribute to the program and maintain it. The important groundwork steps must not be overlooked in an effort to work fast. Everyone who might be involved needs to be thoroughly apprised of the positive goal which can be achieved through cooperation.

1. Identify the Goal. We tend to forget that many general educators have only a vague concept of what happens to hearing impaired children when they become adults. It needs to be demonstrated to teachers that their efforts in accomodating their instruction to the hearing impaired child will bear rich rewards to the child later. The best demonstration, of course, is to bring the teachers into contact with hearing impaired adults.
2. Establish a Favorable Climate. Support must be gained from all appropriate constituent groups . Administrators, general and special teachers, parents, and students must be helped to under-

stand the positive outcomes which can be gained from a mainstream option.

3. Prepare the Staff. Extensive work must be done with those who will be directly involved in providing the services to children. Survey the attitudes of the staff towards hearing impairment and the education of hearing impaired people. Determine in advance the problems which mainstreaming would impose on individual staff members. Reassess work loads so that the extra burdens imposed by mainstreaming are equally shared.
4. Identify Options. Work toward establishing the mainstream options which will bring as many hearing impaired students as possible into daily interaction with normally hearing peers. Educate the staff regarding the variety of ways in which this can be done. Reach a concensus of opinion on the appropriateness of the plan to be implemented.

Maintaining a Program

Once people become comfortable with a new way of working, they begin to observe the positive outcomes for themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to document the changes for those who are not directly involved in the program.

1. Changes in Attitudes. Documenting the changes in children's achievement, which occur as the result of mainstreaming, is a long term project. However, changes in the attitudes of teachers, students, parents and administrators can be assessed, and they are often dramatic. This information can be very valuable and reinforcing to the program.
2. Monitoring Systems. The monitoring of student progress becomes critical in mainstream programs. The general education teacher

requires a great deal of assistance in accurately charting the hearing impaired student's achievement. This task should be a team effort of the general and special teacher. The team will initially require the help of an evaluation specialist or curriculum coordinator.

3. Staff Support. A critical and typically neglected area of program management is the provision of whatever support the general education teacher feels he or she needs in order to work effectively. As a rule, mainstreaming does not work well without accomodations to the general education teacher's increased work load. Making these accomodations must be the shared responsibility of administrators, special teachers, instructional aides, and parents.
4. Administrative Support. The administrative staff must have at least one member whose specialty is education of hearing impaired children. In public schools, this requirement for effective mainstreaming is often ignored.

With the impetus of recent federal legislation for the handicapped, mainstream education for hearing impaired children may be expected to spread rapidly in our public school systems. In theory, the public school offers the complement of resources needed to facilitate effective mainstream options for hearing impaired children. In practice, these resources become fully available as the result of formal commitments by a school system to develop the best possible program which its resources will allow. Effective mainstreaming does not happen anywhere until a person or persons make a commitment to do it and then take the responsibility to enlist the aid of all those who can help make it work.